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SUBJECT: BANGLADESH FOREIGN MINISTRY TAKES MEASURES TO  
COMBAT TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Officials of the Bangladesh Ministry of Foreign Affairs recently attended a briefing and training on the role of the ministry in combating human trafficking on August 18. In addition, the Ministry issued a circular with instructions for its missions abroad on how to combat trafficking in persons. END SUMMARY.

ANTI-TRAFFICKING ROUNDTABLE FOR FOREIGN MINISTRY PERSONNEL  
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¶2. (SBU) As part of the Bangladesh government's anti-trafficking strategy, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs held an all-day roundtable regarding the role of its diplomats in combating trafficking in persons. All director-level officials of the Ministry attended the conference, which was also attended by Embassy and USAID representatives. Shahidul Haque, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) country representative, moderated the program.

¶3. (SBU) The roundtable covered several areas of anti-trafficking policy. IOM provided an overview of irregular migration in the South Asian region, followed by a presentation by Law Professor Dr. Mizanur Rahman on regional and legal instruments to address the problem. POLOFF gave a presentation on U.S. policy to combat trafficking. Much of the discussion focused on ways to combat irregular labor migration.

NEW ANTI-TRAFFICKING CIRCULAR ISSUED  
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¶4. (SBU) The participants also discussed the new Foreign Ministry circular, "Guidelines for Bangladesh Missions Abroad to Combat Trafficking in Persons." The policy was released to Bangladesh's foreign missions on August 5. While the policy guidelines cover trafficking as a whole, there is particular focus on outlining the responsibilities of consular officers in handling cases of labor migration abuses. The guidelines call for renewed vigilance in attesting to the authenticity of employment offers and documentation, responsiveness to Bangladeshi workers who find themselves in abusive situations abroad, and better coordinating with other government offices, including the Expatriate Welfare Ministry, in cracking down on companies

that violate their employment agreements.

FRANK DEBATE ON LABOR ABUSE RESPONSE

15. (SBU) The Foreign Ministry directors engaged in a surprisingly frank debate with the speakers, including with Acting Foreign Secretary Touhid Hossain and Additional Home Secretary Mohammad Mohsin. Several directors expressed

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frustration with the lack of resources at the disposal of embassies and called on senior officials to back up the circular with more funding and personnel. Among other issues, they cited a lack of staff, particularly in countries that have high numbers of Bangladesh laborers. They also pointed out that while on paper the embassies have "contingency funds" that can be used to lend workers money to return to Bangladesh, in reality these funds do not exist.

16. (SBU) Even with resources, efforts to protect laborers often fail, according to several attendees. One diplomat who worked in the Bangladesh Embassy in Seoul described an experience from a few years ago. A laborer sent to work in Korea through a recruitment agency owned by a member of the Bangladesh parliament complained to the Embassy that the recruitment company had misled him about the terms of his employment. The Embassy pursued a claim through the Expatriate Welfare Ministry, but somehow the parliament member traced the complaint back to the worker in Korea. The worker was told his family would "disappear" if he did not withdraw his complaint against the recruitment company. The complaint was promptly withdrawn. (NOTE: After the state of emergency, the parliament member in question was jailed on various corruption charges, and according to the Additional

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Home Secretary, his recruitment company has been closed down.)

COMMENT: A PRODUCTIVE WEEK ON THE ANTI-TRAFFICKING FRONT

17. (SBU) COMMENT. These activities were very positive steps, given the increasing pressure on Bangladesh's diplomats to respond more effectively to trafficking cases abroad. They are an indication of the Bangladesh authorities' commitment to extend the fight against trafficking beyond the Home Ministry to other parts of the government. They also signal the government's willingness to expand the scope of anti-trafficking measures firmly into the area of labor migration abuses. END COMMENT.

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